

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

IN OPPOSITION TO L. D. 833**

**“RESOLVE, TO DIRECT THE DIFW TO ADD KOI TO THE LIST OF FISH
APPROVED FOR AQUARIUMS”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative LONGSTAFF of WATERVILLE

CO-SPONSORED BY: Representative BECK of WATERVILLE
Representative HANINGTON of LINCOLN
Representative HICKMAN of WINTHROP
Representative WOOD of SABATTUS
Representative CYRWAY of KENNEBEC

DATE OF HEARING: May 5, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Michael Brown, Fisheries Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 833**

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife was established to preserve, protect and enhance the inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the State; to encourage the wise use of these resources; to ensure coordinated planning for future use and preservation of these resources; and to provide for the effective management of these resources.

An important part of the Departments mission is to protect native species of fish and wildlife. The importation of fish and wildlife from outside of Maine can pose a significant threat to native species. Any request to import fish into the state must be reviewed and permitted by the Department. Importation requirements are strict and very few permits are issued each year. Most of these permits go to commercial hatcheries or research institutions that maintain strict biosafety protocols.

The importation of fish into the state of Maine poses one of the greatest threats to our native fish assemblages. Non-native fish pose a direct threat through the introduction of

diseases, competition for habitat, predation, and competition for food. Maine is fortunate to be free of many of the country's most harmful fish pathogens. Many attribute this to a decision in the 1980's to prohibit the importation of baitfish into the state.

The State of Maine does have an action plan for managing and controlling invasive aquatic species. The management plan lists a number of invasive freshwater fish that should not be allowed to enter the state and which should be eradicated if they are found in Maine. These species include Koi, rudd, round goby, Eurasian ruffe, gizzard shad and others. These fish have been identified as posing the most significant risk based on their impacts should they become established in the wild.

On May 15, 2013 the Maine Superior Court upheld the Department's decision to deny issuance of a permit to allow possession of Koi by a member of the public. The Superior Court decision stated "*Common carp of all varieties, including Koi, are considered an aquatic nuisance species and are listed on the State of Maine Invasive Species Action Plan under the most harmful group of invasive species. Carp harbor and disseminate pathogens and parasites harmful to native species and present a risk to Maine's fragile native ecosystem.*" This decision was supported by the following information.

Koi are a form of carp. Carp are not native to Maine or the rest of North America, although they have been introduced throughout much of the country including Canada. Carp are considered invasive species and can survive and reproduce in Maine's waters. They are long lived with a reported life span in excess of 20 years. The brightly colored Koi captured in Pickerel Pond were colorful versions of the less colorful nonnative common carp.

Carp feed on both aquatic plants and animals. Carp commonly suck up bottom sediments and muck and then spit out the material to select desirable food items, including aquatic insects and mollusks. This disruptive feeding behavior is detrimental to native plant and fish populations in part because this feeding behavior increases the turbidity of the water and reduces light penetration. As a result, carp adversely impact lake/pond water quality. Carp also uproot and destroy native submerged aquatic plants important as food, cover, and spawning habitat for native fish and other aquatic organisms. They also compete for food with native fish, and can grow to sizes greater than 50 lbs. A small carp similar to the koi captured on Pickerel Pond may produce in excess of 36,000 eggs. In contrast, a similar sized native brook trout may produce only 1,200 eggs. Carp may also reduce local wildlife populations, including waterfowl by degrading marsh habitat important for wildlife production. Once established in a watershed, carp will outcompete native fish, degrade water quality, and decrease property values. Carp carry a number of diseases and parasites that could affect Maine's native fish species.

Fishing has an economic impact of nearly \$300 million a year in the state of Maine. It supports jobs, it generates tax revenues and it creates businesses. Illegal introductions can and do impact existing businesses. Illegal introductions are ruining native fisheries, and the economic impact is being felt on storeowners, camp owners and restaurant owners.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife maintains a list of fish and wildlife allowed into the state without a permit. Most species on the unrestricted list are unable to survive in Maine's climate and pose little risk to Maine's fish and wildlife. Allowing non-native species into the state that can survive and reproduce will only create problems.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.